

# **Civil Air Patrol Oral History Interview**

WNHC 1.83-1

Mr. Marion F. Parkinson

3 March 1983



**NATIONAL HISTORICAL COMMITTEE  
Headquarters CAP**

CIVIL AIR PATROL  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interview

of

Mr. Marion F. Parkinson

by

Lt Colonel Lester E. Hopper, CAP

DATE: 9 March 1983

Location: Pascagoula, Mississippi

## FOREWORD

The following is the transcript of an oral history interview recorded on magnetic tape. Since only minor emendations have been made, the reader should consistently bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of the spoken rather than the written word. Additionally, no attempt to confirm the historical accuracy of the statements has been made. As a result, the transcript reflects the interviewee's personal recollections of a situation as he remembered it at the time of the interview.

Editorial notes and additions made by CAP historians are enclosed in brackets. If feasible, first names, ranks, or titles are also provided. Any additions, deletions and changes subsequently made to the transcript by the interviewee are not indicated. Researchers may wish to listen to the actual interview tape prior to citing the transcript.

## SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

In this oral history interview, Mr. Marion F. Parkinson speaks candidly and interestingly of his World War II experience as a pilot and the Engineering Officer for Civil Air Patrol Coastal Patrol Base 11 during the period June 1942-August 1943.

The interview begins with his early experiences in aviation and continues on through his service at Base 11 and continues until his permanent relocation from his home in Iowa to Pascagoula, Mississippi. Mr. Parkinson discusses many of the obstacles encountered in his operations as an Engineering Officer of a totally civilian organization performing what would normally be a military combat mission. He also recounts one of the epic struggles to "keep them flying" when he recounts the experiences of a multiple crash landing on an island in the Gulf of Mexico and the subsequent recovery of the two vital aircraft involved.

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## CIVIL AIR PATROL ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Civil Air Patrol Oral History interviews were initiated in early 1982 by Lt. Colonel Lester E. Hopper, CAP, of the Civil Air Patrol's National Historical Committee. The overall purpose of these interviews is to record for posterity the activities of selected members of the Civil Air Patrol.

The principle goal of these histories is to increase the base of knowledge relating to the early accomplishments of Civil Air Patrol members who in their own unique way contributed to the defense of our great country. Certainly not of a secondary nature is the preservation of the contributions of individuals as Civil Air Patrol continues its growth.

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS:

That I, Marion F. Parkinson, have this day participated in an oral-magnetic-taped interview with Lt. Col. L. E. Hopper, CAP, covering my best recollections of events and experiences which may be of historical significance to the Civil Air Patrol.

I understand that the tape(s) and the transcribed manuscript resulting therefrom will be accessioned into the Civil Air Patrol's Historial Holdings. In the best interest of the Civil Air Patrol, I do hereby voluntarily give, transfer, convey, and assign all right, title, and interest in the memoirs and remembrances contained in the aforementioned magnetic tapes and manuscript to the Civil Air Patrol, to have and to hold the same forever, hereby relinquishing for myself, my executors, administrators, heirs, and assigns all ownership, right, title, and interest therein to the donee expressly on the condition of strict observance of the following restrictions:

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Marion F. Parkinson DONOR

Dated 5-7-83

Accepted on behalf of the Civil Air Patrol by

L. E. Hopper

Dated 5/21/83



## CAP ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Number WNHC 1.83-1  
Taped Interview With: Mr. Marion F. Parkinson  
Date of Interview: March 9, 1983  
Location: Pascagoula, Mississippi  
Conducted by: Lt. Colonel Lester E. Hopper, CAP

- H. Parky, if you don't mind me calling you that, why don't you just start off and give us a little background on where you came from, how you got into aviation and things of that nature.
- P. I started out in High School, my brother and I bought an airplane. My mother and father signed the note at the bank for us to buy our own Jenny JN4D, a 1914 model with an OX5 engine. We taught ourselves to fly and that put us into aviation. We started immediately carrying passengers and barnstorming and made enough money to pay for the bamboo bomber, such as it was. I then stayed in aviation as a fixed base operator down thru the years until the war started.
- H. Where was that Parky?
- P. That was in Iowa. The state of Iowa.
- H. Where you born in Iowa?
- P. Yes, in Iowa. In Lyon county, the county seat was in Rock Rapids, that's up in the northwest corner of the state of Iowa. About 40

miles south of Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

H. And when was that, Parky?

P. That was in 1907, August 27.

H. Okay, go ahead if you don't mind.

P. Well, when the war started I had a fixed base operation, but no government contract, like a CPT contract. When December 7th took place, Uncle Sam locked up all private airplanes. Shut up the operations. Everything had to be locked up, or there had to be a guard 24 hours a day on each airplane. So as a result, my airplane was locked up. I disposed of them of course, so naturally as the war got under way I was looking for a spot where I could be in the thick of the operation and heard about them setting up these anti-submarine patrol units nationally. So I went to the state capital and I joined CAP and my serial number was 7-2-660. I don't know what the 3 sets of numbers mean.

H. They relate to your military district, state, with the last group meaning you were the 660th member in your state.

P. Is that right? Glad I asked. I heard about them setting up the Coastal Patrol bases and the submarine unit, so I told the state Commander at the state capital I was interested in getting assigned.

H. Do you recall his name by any chance?

P. His name was Johnson. I believe it was Paul Johnson. He said he would get in touch with me. Well, this was the middle of June 1942. So in about a week I received a call to go to the state capital for an interview and they told me I could have my choice of going to an established base at Rehoboth Beach, Maryland or a new base they were setting up in the Gulf of Mexico someplace. They didn't say Pascagoula or anything else just said there would be a Gulf of Mexico base. So I said I believe I'd like to go to the one situated on the Gulf of Mexico. So that's the way I got assigned to the base here that was being established. Landed in Pascagoula on July 5. The personnel started coming in to the old airport here called Raby field.

H. How do you spell that?

P. R A B Y

H. Raby field, okay.

P. It was one of the first airports designated in the nation. One of the oldest ones, of course it was a little grass field. We didn't know exactly what the operation or how it was going to function for a day or so. They quartered us in a Coast Guard Artillery Base that was set up on the beach with gun emplacements for protecting the shores. They had 5 inch guns and we remained there for billeting until we got our quarters built on Raby field.

H. Who built those quarters, Parky?

- P. We built them ourselves from manpower on the base. We picked up government buildings and disassembled them up in Monroeville, Alabama. Moved them to Pascagoula and we assembled them and that's the way our quarters were set up.
- H. Was that an old CCC camp or something up there in Monroeville?
- P. Yes, it was. It was an old CCC camp. The patrol flights started within about a week. All patrols were made in pairs, two airplanes. A pilot and an observer in each airplane. They had two way radio back to the base. When we were coming out of the area where we operated we could talk to our base. When we left the airport to go to the area for patrolling we could talk. Other than that we had to maintain radio silence while on patrol. Our call letters were WXTB11. They had a real powerful transmitter at the base, but much of the radio equipment was inadequate.
- H. Who owned the transmitter at the bases, for example, Parky?
- P. The government.
- H. The government owned it. It wasn't that somebody bought one.
- P. No. The government also set up the bomb reventment and stationed a unit of Army armament officers and crewmen to put the bombs on the airplanes and take them off.
- H. Did you all have bombs initially?
- P. We didn't have bombs until about 3 months after we got into

operation. The bomb racks had to be fabricated and assembled which was done at Keesler Field and Brookly Field.

H. You didn't have to do that yourself. Keesler and Brookly did it for you.

P. Ya. The small airplanes carried 300 pound demolition bombs and the larger airplanes carried 350 pound depth charges.

H. Did you say 300 pound or 100 pound demos.

P. The small ones were 100 pounds. The large ones were 350 pounds. Patrols were flown from daylight till dark in pairs. Most of the time it was with the lead airplane at 1000 feet and the follow up airplane at 750 feet. At the time the Navy couldn't do any patrolling because they were fighting such things as Midway in the Pacific, and in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. The Coast Guard patrolled the beaches for us. To enter our network we went 30 miles south of the islands and that's where we checked into our network. Our work was not Coastal Patrol it was convoy patrol. 90% of it was convoying ships. The ships would make up out of Texas, Louisiana and Alabama and converge at a point out in the Gulf. That's where we would stay with them until the next Coastal Patrol unit would pick them up. If they were travelling east it would be Panama City. Then the next one was further down the Florida coast. To the West they had Grand Isle and the next one was Beaumont. So they tried to keep small plane coverage over the convoy as much as possible. It wasn't the matter of dropping bombs as much as the nuisance value of the observing program that deterred the effect of the German subs get-

ing to the convoy. The German subs that were in the Carribean were the 750 ton double-walled subs that could stay away from Germany as much as 3 years, by being able to get food and fuel for the subs. The refueling in the Gulf was done mainly by Mexican sailboats. About 30 miles south of Mobile Bay was a refueling point and so much of the food was picked up at Grand Isle. Their Commander, the German Commander of the Carribean operation had lived in New Orleans for 15 years previous to the war as a Naval attache' at the German embassy.

H. You wouldn't remember his name, would you?

P. No, I don't. But he knew so many of the fishermen out at Grand Isle by their first name. They would surface a sub and using a megaphone call for different kinds of food. Of course they paid them well for the food. They had to deliver the food or get their fishing wharves shot to pieces.

H. Even after they had the Coastal Patrol Base at Grand Isle and the Coast Guard stations and everything?

P. Oh yes. Cause they could work when the units couldn't fly. They would come in during foggy weather. Just like out at Horn Island, where the Germans came up and stayed there for 2 days in real heavy fog. Charged the batteries, the men had time on shore of Horn Island and nobody could get near them, because the fog was so thick you could cut it with a knife. As far as them torpedoing some of the ships built by Ingalls shipyards, they weren't interested in that because they were after oil. They were sinking tankers that were moving through the Gulf.

- H. Okay,--so the Ingalls stuff left out of here empty so they weren't interested in that.
- P. They weren't interested in that. They would rather wait until it got loaded with men and supplies and take it out in the middle of the Atlantic and then shoot it down. The east coast subs were the little 350 ton single-walled ones. They ran in wolf packs and the Civil Air Patrol Coastal Patrol units were quite effective in damage to some of them. I don't know how many or the score or anything.
- H. Well, the score is supposedly two, Parky, but I can't find any evidence on it.
- P. Well, in the Gulf we never droppped a bomb on a submarine cause we couldn't find one. You had 45 seconds to get over a sub if you did spot one. If you're a mile away in 45 seconds that sub would submerge and and get out of the reach of anything. We were informed that the German subs carried in their torpedo chamber what was called a "pillen wurfer". This was a torpedo they would shoot that would put out pieces of cloth, food, oil and everything else to float to the surface. The units just didn't find any subs. Now there was one submarine sunk in the Gulf but it was done by the Air Force by a B-29 on a training mission out of Salinas, Smokey Hill Air base, Kansas. It came in here and sank the submarine.
- H. Who had spotted the sub, or did they just see it themselves?
- P. No, they were called in. I don't know who spotted it, but it was

down at the mouth of the river. What the German subs were doing at the mouth of the river was waiting till a ship got in the pass and then come up on the surface and use their deck guns and shoot a hole in the rear end of the ship and of course the Navy didn't have anything to pull them up, but the Army did, and the U.S. Army was doing the work of keeping the mouth of the Mississippi open.

H. They were trying to block the passes, in other words.

P. Blocking the passes. That was all they were interested in.

H. Going back a little to the background of the base. Some of the research I've done indicates you had about 80 people here. Is that about right?

P. Yes, that's about right.

H. How many of those were pilots? Do you have any idea?

P. Yes, about 30.

H. About 30 pilots.

P. Of course there were a certain contingent, some of them were firemen, others were guards, others were mechanics, cooks, and so forth.

H. You were the Engineering Officer, right?

P. Yes.



H. You flew and kept the airplanes flying both?

P. That's right. I was the number 3 man for most hours flown on the base. And still took care of my engineering duties. I was pretty busy.

H. You remember how many hours that was by chance?

P. Yes, I think it was 640 plus.

H. That was quite an accomplishment, keeping the airplanes going, plus getting that much time in the air.

P. Everybody worked hard.

H. You were here just a little over a year, about 13 months, right?

P. That's right.

H. Everything closed down about August of 43. How about your aircraft? The records I've seen said you had about 13. Do you remember what kind you had?

P. The smallest horsepower you could have was 90 horses. That consisted of 7 small Stinson Voyagers, model 10A, they had 90 horse Franklins. Out of the group of little Stinsons, five of them broke their crankshaft, 80 miles from the base, over the water. They all got home with the broken crankshaft. The shaft would break just behind the propeller thrust bearing on the front of the engine and on the throw so the end of the shaft couldn't

leave the engine and the knuckling effect on the broken shaft would keep it running. Of course, you lost the number one cylinder, the front cylinder stopped firing so the boys came home with 3 cylinders running. They'd throw everthing overboard. Everything including their shoes, and use half-flaps and with a full throttle they could maintain 60 MPH. That brought all 5 of those airplanes home with broken crankshafts.

H. And those were all offshore incidents?

P. All offshore incidents. Then we had a group of larger Stinsons, big gull wing Stinsons.

H. How many of those did you have?

P. 5 or 6. Different, all different models. Had Stagger wing Beechcraft.

H. How many Stagger wings did you have?

P. Just one. It was lost at sea.

H. That was the BT97 that Davis went down in.

P. That's right. That's the airplane.

H. All of these airplanes were owned by who, Parky?

P. Well, different individuals had them assigned to the base, some out of New York, some out of Detroit.

- H. Okay, but all of them were owned by individuals, none of them government owned aircraft.
- P. No, they were all owned by individuals. Some of them were real fine airplanes and some of them were borderline jobs that we had to get new engines for. I was able to get some engines from the Army Air Corps for some of the airplanes. Like some of the Wacos they used the Jacobs engine in.
- H. How you had some Wacos here too?
- P. Yes, we had 5 or 6 Wacos.
- H. So then your aircraft count really was bigger then the 13 that we estimated.
- P. Oh yes, I think the highest count was about 30.
- H. About 30. The statistics that I had were for a given date, and they might have been incorrect, that's the reason I wanted to get then confirmed or denied since you were here.
- P. Well, we covered mostly the main part of the operations. I could tell you we had our own mess hall and we drew the groceries from Keesler Field. We got good meat and plenty of milk. The area was short of milk and the grocery stores just didn't have any milk, but we were well fed. For entertainment at night we had our own club. And they discouraged the boys associating with the local personnel because there was information on base that was confidential. Such as the making up of the convoys and that infor-

mation was available for almost anyone who wanted to go into the operations room. We had our own fire truck and men who were trained to handle a fire.

H. Just go on. I'm just kind of checking off what I wanted to make sure I covered with you.

P. Ya.

H. You're doing real well.

P. You think so. HA HA The hours were long for most of the pilots. Of course if you were on the dawn patrol you didn't fly the dawn patrol the next day, you'd fly and evening patrol the next day.

H. Range of aircraft. What's a Stinson 10A good for.

P. We'd get seven hours maximum.

H. 7 hours. Is that with normal tanks or was that some extra capacity?

P. Well, they were factory installed tanks. But it was, that model Stinson came out with a single tank or the twin tank. All these were the twin-tanked airplanes. All speeds were set up, navigational problems were set up for 90 MPH, and airplanes that were faster, you just slowed 'em down.

H. Slowed down and mused around.

P. Yep.

H. Go ahead about your living conditions here on the base.

That's of interest.

P. Well, they had hutments that were built to handle the 8 man to a hut. They were requisitioned from the government. They were about a 12 by 12 or 14 by 14 hut with sides that lifted up and were screened so that you had plenty of ventilation. The main large building where all the toilet facilities and the staff quarters and the meetings were held was a building maybe 80 feet long and 40 feet wide.

H. And that's one of the ones you hauled down from Monroeville.

P. Yes, that's right.

H. You mentioned that you had pretty good food down there based on it being issued from Keesler.

P. Right. It was excellent food.

H. About recreation. They really didn't like you going to town.

P. They didn't mind us going into town, but they wanted us to have our recreational activities in a group.

H. What did you all generally do?

P. Dance and bingo, play cards.

H. How about on base, did you all have softball teams and those sort of things?

P. No, there wasn't time for that.

H. Didn't have time for that. Daytime was busy.

P. Daytime work was pretty much on the go.

H. What were your rules about night flying? Did you do much night flying?

P. No, only returning from a convoy patrol and come in at night. but no night flights.

H. Was your airport lighted at the time.

P. No it wasn't. You had to have some proficiency in being able to land in the dark because there was no lighting on the field.

H. How about your uniforms? What did you all wear for uniforms in those days, Parky?

P. Well, everyday uniforms were chino khakis, and of course the dress uniforms were about like the Army Air Corps dress uniforms.

H. Was there anything to make them look different than the Army Air Corps?

P. Yes, red epaulets. Red shoulder straps.

H. Did you all like them or dislike them?

P. Oh, they liked them, they really did.

H. I ask that because some didn't.

P. Well, I guess so. But maybe didn't. But I got to travel around enough scrounging up equipment and stuff that they thought I was with the Canadian Air Force.

H. Canadian, Russian or somebody. I noticed one thing in some pictures that I've seen of the period. The standard Civil Air Patrol wing was a full eagle wing. Most of the people wore what looked like a Army Air Corps wing with a CAP seal in the middle. Was that a homemade thing or something?

P. No, they were obtained through the National Headquarters.

H. Oh they were. The one with the regular air force wing came from National Headquarters?

P. Well, the ones that were allowed on the base.

H. I've seen both in some pictures that I've seen of the area. That's the reason I was curious. Often wondered why they didn't wear the standard wing. They just changed them around or something.

P. After the base was closed, the next year, Air Medals were awarded at Travis City, Michigan. The Air Force flew us from around the United States for the big meeting and General Lucien Beau made the

Air Medal awards and the letter from President Truman.

H. What was the reason of going all the way up to Michigan for it?

P. I don't know. It was very interesting. They picked us up at Keesler Field and flew us up in a B25.

H. Well, Esmond Avery was your CO down here. Was he from Michigan?

P. Yes, he was from Michigan.

H. There were several others, like Johnnie Damyer and Arthur Billet were Michiganders, do you remember them?

P. Oh, very well. They were the first ones to join the Duck fraternity. Went down.

H. Oh they did, they were Duck Club members? That's one of the things I wanted to cover with you.

P. They were.

H. Who else was a Duck Club member out here? Did you get a Duck Club pin for that thing out on the Chandeleurs?

P. No. To get in the Duck Club you had to go down in the Gulf.

H. Well, Chandeleurs is Gulf to me. At least it was dry though. Later on we'll talk about that incident if you don't mind. But who else



got in the Duck Club from here, do you recall?

P. There were four others but I don't recall their names offhand..

H. Did they actually get a Duck Club emblem to wear?

P. Yes, they got a duck to sew on their sleeves.

H. Oh, on their sleeves?

P. Yes.

H. You say they wore it on their sleeve?

P. Yes, it was a black duck with some gold embellishment on it.

H. Oh, it was black and gold? Somewhere I heard it was blue and red.

P. That's right. It was black and gold.

H. Black and gold, my background must have been wrong with that red and blue.

P. When Damyer and Billet went into the Gulf they were flying a model SM8A Stinson. Their engine failed and they landed close to a large tanker that was from Sweden. It was a brand new German built tanker that the Swedish government had captured and was using for hauling crude.

H. Do you recall about when that was, when they went in?

P. Ya, that was August of 42.

H. You hadn't been here very long then?

P. No. The base had been in operation, the flights had been in operation about 30 days. Damyer and Billet were picked up by this ship and they didn't get back to this base for a about a week. They went to the ships destination where ever it was before they let them get off the ship.

H. You all knew they were all right, though?

P. Oh yes, oh I should say so. Talked to them on the radio.

H. But that was crashed - one Stinson.

P. That's one Stinson that went down the drain.

H. SM8A, that's a Voyager?

P. SM8A, no that's a large airplane.

H. That's another version of Stinson, huh? That's one place my education is very lacking. I know the military aircraft of the period but the civil aircraft of the period I need to do some studying on. You don't recall any of the others in the Duck Club but you said there were several.

P. Oh ya, I remember them, their faces, but I don't remember their names.

- H. Well, that's readily understandable, because after 2 years of research I have about 8 names of people who served at Pascagoula.
- P. Is that right?
- H. Just in case you recall some of them yourself; Esmond Avery, Johnny Damyer, Billet, Holdeness, Mel Holdeness, J. D. Hammett, Charlie Whitaker, Earl Stuenkel, Bob Hester, John Hammond and of course Caughlin and Davis. And that's about all I've been able to identify. You think of any others?
- P. Oh, yes. Many of them.
- H. You can think of some names?
- P. Oh, yes.
- H. Why don't you just rattle them off to me.
- P. Well, gee whiz, taking them off the top, they don't come.
- H. No problem. That's one of those little enrichment things, the more people I can identify the better it is. I tell you, you all did a fabulous job back then and there, the conditions in Pascagoula were not the best, but they were better than some. Like Grand Isle as an example was a horrible mess.
- P. I flew down to Grand Isle to help inspect the planes about once a month.

H. Oh, you did?

P. Yes, and Panama City, too.

H. Okay, then you got to work with Muntz at Grand Isle a little bit.

P. Yes.

H. We did a similar oral history tape like this with Bill Fanderson from there.

P. I don't remember the name.

H. Bill later became and A & E for one of the airlines in New Orleans. He was down there quite a bit of the time. A little more background about things around Pascagoula. I noticed in some picture a lot of your airplanes had a bumblebee with a pair of field glasses on it. Was that sort of your logo?

P. That was the base logo.

H. Do you by any chance remember the color of it?

P. No, I don't. It has red and blue and it had yellow and white but I couldn't tell you which was what and where for nothing.

H. So, in other words, if we guess at it we're as good as anybody.

P. That was designed by a boy from Perry, Iowa. That was a guard on the base. I can't recall his name now.

- H. What was it that brought all you Iowans down here, was it just that a lot of you knew each other at home.
- P. No, what really did it was, the Detroit Wing was setting up the base and they just didn't have enough to go around. They called on the Wing Commander from the state of Iowa for help.
- H. Cause I noticed that there was an awful lot of Michigan people and an awful of of Iowa people. Sort of a silly question, but what did you do with your spare time?
- P. There wasn't any.
- H. There wasn't any?
- P. Not for me.
- H. That's right with that many flying hours.
- P. There was no spare time. If there was spare time it was spent studying something or reading up on regulations we had to know. All the pilots had to be able to receive 8 words a minute blinker.
- H. You had to do blinker as well as Morse, huh? Well, blinker and audible too.
- P. And 8 words a blinker is pretty fast for us.
- H. Pretty fast for anybody. Maybe all right for a Navy signalman, but for an airplane driver it's fast. Actually you pretty much worked

from daylight to dark. Either flying, and you say you had dawn patrols and dusk patrols, were those in addition to convoy duty?

P. Well, no that's when the flying started at daylight and the flying ended at dark. If you were on a convoy, at daylight you were out over a convoy. So you left maybe an hour before daylight or maybe 30 minutes before daylight. And you got in maybe 30 minutes to an hour after sunset.

H. Did you just rotate airplanes? Did you get any actual searches for submarines or anything of that nature or just convoy coverage?

P. Well, if we weren't on convoy we were working the search area.

H. Okay, at the same time.

P. At the same time.

H. Other than the Stinsons that broke crankshafts and made it in, do you recall any other accidents around here?

P. No. Maybe the patrols had to be cut short, land on an island because of fuel shortage or starvation. But other than that, that was about the only trouble we had.

H. Most of your airplanes, you didn't have any crashes on the field or anything of that nature. You either made it or you didn't.

P. That's right.

H. How about the spotting of survivors? Did you all spot any survivors here?

P. No, we sure didn't.

H. And how about submarines, you didn't spot any submarines or drop any bombs.

P. Nope.

H. So basically you did convoy duty is what you're saying.

P. Yes, that's right.

H. How about telling us a little bit about the thing out at the Chandeléurs.

P. HA HA

H. That's an interesting facet about your background.

P. Well, we had an airplane that ran out of fuel and Mel Holdeness and his observer were flying a Fairchild 24 and they made it to the island, but they hit a big log and knocked the landing gear off and damaged the airplane. So we, the operations sent 2 or 3 airplanes out to look over the situation and figure out whether we could land. Nobody had ever landed on Chandeléur yet. They decided yes and we sent a plane out. So they sent me and I took a mechanic with me and went out and picked the spot where everybody said we should land. It looked like just dry dirt. But this dry

dirt was just a scum on the surface, and I landed on the bog and put that airplane out of operation.

H. What kind of airplane was that?

P. It was a Stinson Voyager.

H. And you say you had a mechanic with you? Yourself and a mechanic. Do you recall his name by any chance?

P. It was Earl Stuenkel. So instead of picking us up, they sent us a crew and a cook and a tent.

H. By boat, huh?

P. By boat, the Coast Guard brought them out. And so I surveyed the damage and figured out the parts that we would need to repair us, to rebuild the airplane and get them flying. And so we were out there several days.

H. But you were in constant communication with the people back here.

P. All the time by radio.

H. So you weren't really in a dangerous situation.

P. Oh my, no.

H. Well, it probably wasn't fun. Is that the island with the wild boar on it?



P. Ya. There were a lot of wild pigs on it at that time.

H. Did you ever shoot some of them?

P. Ya, and barbequed them and ate them.

H. Were they good.

P. No, they tasted of fish.

H. They were fishy pigs.

P. They were fishy.

H. What's your assesment of the thing? Was it an interesting period in your life?

P. Oh ya. Very much.

H. When you rebuilt the airplanes, who flew them off?

P. I flew one off and Charlie Whitaker flew the other one off.

H. Did you prepare the beach a little at that time?

P. That's right. Got the logs cleared. There were lots of logs on the beaches at that time. Stuff that had washed in from storms and no people on the beaches picking up the debris and garbage. It took a little work to get the beach ready.

H. You know we're in a hurricane-belt down here, did you all get any bad storms while you were trying to operate down here?

P. No, not really.

H. It was the good years, huh?

P. It was the good years.

H. Another thing I'd like to touch upon. Caughlin and Davis were the two people who were killed on the BT97. You said that was a Stagger wing Beech. Whose stagger wing was it?

P. It belonged to a man named Matthews. Hugh B. Matthews. He now lives on the west coast.

H. Have you been in contact with him lately?

P. Oh, yes.

H. You are in contact with him?

P. Oh, yes.

H. That's one of the things that if I can get some names and addresses from you I'd certainly appreciate it. I have a little questionnaire that would help us get some additional information. One of the things that I'm interested in is do you know what happened to the records of the base.

P. No, I have no idea.

H. We cannot find any Civil Air Patrol records for the time. Now your control organization as far as the Army was concerned was the 26th Anti-Submarine wing out of Miami?

P. Right.

H. Since they were a regular Army Air Corps unit at the time, a lot of their records are up at the Air Force library. And that's where I've been doing most of my research on Pascagoula. Back to the Caughlin-Davis thing. As I understood it, it was an extended search wasn't it? Didn't you all spend quite a lot of time trying to find them?

P. I should say so. That's right. We found the oil slick a matter of an hour or so after it happened, but we spent quite a little time searching for them.

H. I have the coordinates. Geographically where is that, Parky?

P. Well, about 30 miles south of Sand Island light. Which is at the Southern tip of Mobile Bay.

H. That must have been almost your east boundary, wasn't it?

P. No. We worked maybe to Orange Beach, another 30 miles, and then Panama City picked up.

H. One of these gentlemen was a doctor. Was he the base doctor?

P. He was the base doctor.

H. Did he normally fly too? Was he a pilot or an observer?

P. Yes, he was a pilot.

H. So he was really both. It was just apparently his turn. Did you all fly in rotation or how did you pick crews?

P. Well, one of the operations officers set up the schedules, kept the crews staggered.

H. Kept them rotated so it would cut down on fatigue. What do you recall about that search? Anything in particular?

P. No, it was good weather. We found the oil slick right away. We worked out several miles from that slick hour after hour. Of course nothing showed up. Now one of the wing tanks washed ashore about 10 years after it went down and a boy that was in the unit in the Civil Air Patrol had the tank at Ocean Springs for several years, and he died and then it got lost.

H. How would you identify a tank back to a particular airplane like that?

P. Because we knew the shape of the tank, it was a lower wing tank.

H. Ya and there wouldn't be that many Beech Stagger wing tanks floating around.

P. No, that's right.

H. That was a fine airplane but there weren't too many of them around. One of the unusual airplanes that came over here was Grand Isle brought their Fleetwing Seabird here one time, didn't they?

P. Seabird. Fleetwing Seabird.

H. Seabird?

P. Ya, they brought it over, I did some work on it. Had the boys do some work on it. That was a very fine airplane. It was stainless steel.

H. Before we part company today I'll give you a picture of another Fleetwing Seabird that was at another Coastal Patrol airbase.

P. Oh, is that right?

H. The current CAP News has a little picture story about it.

P. Now, there was a rare airplane at Beaumont, I believe. In Texas, the Texas base, maybe it was Corpus Christi.

H. Well, there was one in Beaumont, one in Corpus and one in Brownsville.

P. It was the Johnson family.

H. Sikorsky

P. Sikorsky, yes. It was lost towing it in.

H. I think that was out of Beaumont if I'm not mistaken.

P. That airplane was quite famous.

H. Something to do with Africa, right?

P. Ya, right.

H. That's been one of the really interesting things, following airplanes around. Is there anything you can think of that we haven't covered, cause the more I can learn the better off we are.

P. I think we've covered it real well. A little humorous incident, we had a very fine cook that was an Indian. And he was really dishing out some good food. And boy, everybody was going for it. He had the best stew meat stew and after about a week we discovered that all the dogs were gone. HA HA We found the dog bones under the truck. HA HA

H. Sure he was Indian and not Vietnamese. HA HA

P. He might have been from Viet Nam but he could sure make dog meat taste good.

H. That's the name of it. Going back just a little bit on a few things, Esmond Avery, was he your CO all the time?

P. All the time.

H. He opened up with it and stayed with it till you all closed down.

P. That's right.

H. Give me a little background on how you closed down. That's always interesting.

P. Well, the airplanes that were here were under contract to the Civil Air Patrol.

H. Now, you say contract. How much were they paid to use the airplanes do you recall?

P. They were paid by the hour for different models rated by the horsepower. The amounts I don't remember. It wasn't enough hardly to pay for the fresh engines needed. And so the Air Force and the Air Corps says, "Well, we need some freight hauled." So the government took the airplanes, the larger ones, to Brookley Field and made cargo haulers out of them. Put in plywood floors and plywood sides and tie down rings for hauling freight. And the airplanes left.

H. Did the pilots go with them?

P. No. Most of them went in the military. Most of them went in the Air Force.

H. Now did the government buy the airplanes from them?

P. No. The owners still leased them.

H. Lease arrangement.

P. Lease arrangement.

H. But they didn't go with their airplane.

P. I was supposed to take the airplane assigned to Denver, 8th Air Force. So I flew to Tinker field in Oklahoma City and got weathered in there. And that's as far as I ever got. I got orders to go to El Paso, Biggs field and fly on a search down there for a B24 that supposedly had crashed in Mexico. So I went down there and flew for I guess two weeks hunting for this airplane and 2 or 3 other planes.

H. You actually went into Mexico?

P. Oh yes. Our association with the Mexican government was very friendly. The Mexican military end was out at Chivawa City. About 150 miles south of the border.

H. Okay, where were you operating your search from?

P. Biggs field.

H. Biggs field? And that's where?

P. El Paso. A military base. So while I was there operating and flying out of there, I decided the war is getting straightened out well enough, I'm going to see if I can get out of this operation. So I went to the Air Force's Operations Officer of



the Army Air Corps and told him what I wanted. A Capt. Vandevender. He got on the teletype and got my release from Washington. They put me on a troop train and I rode for two days to get from El Paso to Pascagoula. I think it went to Winnipeg Canada first. HA HA

H. And you came back to Pascagoula and stayed. By that time your active duty tour was over. What did you do after that?

P. I set up fixed base operation out at the old airport.

H. They had started releasing some civilian flying then?

P. Yes, it was restricted to training.

H. Was it a contract flight instruction school?

P. No. Just open to the public.

H. Open to the public. And then you stayed in Pascagoula, well I know you stayed in Pascagoula cause you're still here. HA HA

P. Ya, that's right.

H. I tell you it's been a real pleasure talking to you about these things, and as I say, the more information we gather on the tremendous job you all did, it was really something. And after your active duty thing you weren't involved in CAP at all.

P. No, not after that.

H. How do you evaluate those times. Good times, bad times?

P. Good.

H. Good times. It certainly is the high point in a guys career when he does something like that for his country. Was that the way most people felt at that time.

P. I think so. I believe so. Yep.

H. Real good patriotism then, huh?

P. Yep.

What follows is a transcription of Mr. Parkinson's comments with regard to a review of a hundred or so contemporary photographs of Base 11's operations. Comments follow in sequence of the numbering on the pictures.

H. Looking at picture number 1, is that your equivalent to your compass rose on your dirt strip?

P. That's right. I should say these are good pictures, there's the operations room with the TWX hooked up with Miami, Florida.

H. You ought to recognize some of these people, especially the mechanics working on engines later on.

P. Ya.

H. That's a dinged up airplane isn't it? No, that's not the dinged up one.

P. This one was dinged up. This is the one that went down over the island.

H. Oh, those are the ones?

P. Yep.

H. That's your boys working there I imagine.

P. These boys are too.

- H. Okay, that's not guards, that's mechanics. And there is your radio.
- P. This is the radio, we standardized the radio equipment on all the airplanes. Each airplane had its own type of equipment. RCA and Lear and this and that and so forth. What we did, we obtained all equipment exactly the same. So the unit like in this picture could be installed in my airplane. So if you had radio trouble you could have another radio in 5 minutes. You had 3 wires to disconnect and a couple of locks to unlock to take all the radio gear out in one operation. Worked out very well. This is Esmond Avery, the base commander.
- H. I noticed you all had some ladies, huh?
- P. Yes, I believe there were 4 ladies on the base. This is the mess hall.
- H. What's that on picture 22, everybody getting Mae Wests, huh?
- P. Ya, everybody getting on a Mae West. This was a Doctor out of St. Louis.
- H. Wash day there on # 27, huh?
- P. Ya. That's what it is. It's in the lounge area of the base. The observation tower, it was the bomb reventment. It was manned by an ordnance crew that hung the bombs on and removed the bombs off the airplanes. Had a bomb release fail in the front end and dropped the front end of the bomb down hanging under the airplane and the back end hung up and you couldn't trip it. I come in and landed

it with that bomb scraping on the ground and the little propeller that armed the bomb didn't turn, so the bomb wasn't armed. HA HA

H. Lucky, huh? Apparently the shackle released without pulling the arming wire.

P. Ya, that's right. Just the front end. It was a 100 pound demo they dropped down there.

H. But if you knew it, I bet you were sweating.

P. Oh, I knew it. I knew all about it.

H. If nothing else it could drop down too far with a shot tacked airplane like that it would cart wheel you.

P. This is the crew that went to Monroeville to disassemble the buildings up there. They went to the church supper they held for them. They brought in a bunch of girls and the church sponsored the boys to have a date with a whole bunch of girls while they were there, and what a time they had.

H. Ya, I imagine so. Well, that's part of their patriotism of the period.

P. Ya, that's right. That shows those 100 pounders being installed over the airplane.

H. What's that picture #50.

P. Picture # 50. This is a picture taken at Monroeville and there

is the church where they had the supper. This is a wedding. That took place on the base.

H. Do you remember who it was?

P. No it was one of the guards that married a local woman.

H. He took home a souvenir.

P. He sure did. This is South Pascagoula. Here is a picture of the Mississippi delta.

H. On #53, huh?

P. Ya. The bomb did the armament work. This is Round Island.

H. Round Island is 55.

P. Ya. 57 is Horn Island. This picture was taken from a ZQC6 Waco of an Airmaster Cessna.

H. That's #60.

P. Another view of Horn Island. Here is a view of Chandeleur #62.

H. That's where you had your fun.

P. That's where we had the pig that tasted like fish.

H. Fishy pork. I've heard of fishy duck, but fishy pork I've never heard of.

P. Here's a picture taken on Chandeleur.

H. And that's your crash on Chandeleur, right there.

P. Ya, that's it. That's a picture of the Fleetwing Seabird. That was owned by a boy named Florsheim.

H. Out of Shreveport.

P. Out of Shreveport.

H. I haven't been able to find him though. I've asked several people in Shreveport to find some Florsheims.

P. He died.

H. Oh, he did?

P. He was a young man.

H. Cause anybody who owned an airplane that expensive in those days had to come from some substance.

P. They said he was a cousin to the Florsheim shoe family. That's what was said. I don't know whether that was true or not. This fellow was a pilot named Carroll Day, he lost a finger. He went home on some sick leave for the family and his little pet dog bit him on the finger and blood poisoning set in and he came back short a finger.

H. Lost a finger, huh? The crash above it on those two pictures.

P. Yes, now that took place.

H. Cause that's #11 so that's your airplane.

P. That's right. This took place close to the airport. Nobody was hurt. Came in, landed in pecan trees and destroyed an Airmaster Cessna. You asked me if there was any damage to the airplane field. But, this one I had forgotten about.

H. Well, #1138 was an Airmaster Cessna.

P. Right.

H. Did you have any other Airmaster Cessna's here?

P. Yes, we had a couple more Airmasters. They were a fine airplane.

H. What's the one upside down?

P. That's another Airmaster Cessna. I don't know where that one was. Well, we had 5 girls on the base I see. That's five.

H. Do you recall some of their names. Were they wives of some of the guys?

P. No.

H. I know they had some bases where the wives would go into active duty.



P. No these were no wives. They were office keepers. I don't remember their names except one. I remember this girl's name was Mila.

H. Mila.

P. Ya, she was a Polish girl out of Detroit.

H. I see by the people standing in the ranks that you all had your military days too.

P. Once a week.

H. Once a week. Saturday or something like that. Saturday inspection.

P. Ya, that's right. This is the base Commander Esmond Avery. That's John Hammond-Operations and Bob Anderson-Intelligence.

H. Okay, Anderson is #94.

P. And that's me.

H. I wondered who that was. HA HA. That's why I said I'd recognize you.

P. Ya, that's Dr. Davis and Dick Evans, he's dead.

H. #96.

P. And this is the boy that was killed with Doc Davis.

H. Caughlin.

P. Yep, Caughlin.

H. And that's allegedly the tank out of the airplane.

P. Say, ya, it certainly is. That's it. #99. Yep, that's right.

H. These are just a few more random shots and there are some of Grand Isle. Bill Fanderson was helpful and lent me his photograph file and I copied it. There's some more of your ladies at Pascagoula.

P. Yep. You were asking about the number of airplanes and I said 30. Keesler field had a fly by and we'd put all our airplanes over at Keesler for that. It was a bond drive.

H. A bond drive.

P. And I think we had 28 airplanes. That's the airplane that went in the pecan grove.

H. Ya, that's the same Cessna.

P. Same Cessna.

H. Someplace around here looks like you had an AT6 came in.

P. We had quite a few airplanes came in.

H. Just came in to visit, huh?

P. No, they were usually in for an inspection. Most of them were O49's, big ol North Americans. Observation.

H. Okay, now you're starting to look at Grand Isle.

P. Oh, yes.

H. That's what they flew off of. Well, you went there so you know what it was like.

P. That's right. Grand Isle didn't have as nice a place as we did to operate out of.

H. Here's the ID card from Bill Fanderson. That was Bill's ID card at the time.

P. Yep, sure is.

H. He insisted that I take it. Cause that's one of the things by the way, that's a bomb shackle. He liberated a bomb shackle.

P. B7, ya.

H. He told me they had to install their own down there. Their own shackle.

P. Keesler field and Brookley field did all of ours.

H. Well, that's the way I thought it was. Bill's remembrance was a little different.

P. The Commander of the Army Air Base at Savannah, Georgia was a Major Orcutt and he designed the little bomb site that was used.

H. What, the beer can and bailing wire?

P. Yep. Give us two mirrors.

H. Oh they did?

P. Ya, it was two mirrors in a tube and it had a light inside and it was set to do your bombing at 1000 feet. The airplane had to stay perfectly level. The observer would fly the airplane using the elevators, the ailerons and keep the plane perfectly level at 90 MPH. The pilot was going to do the bomb work, used the rudder and he would steer the airplane over the point and when he was looking in this mirror that's all he was looking in and steering with the rudder and he skidding the airplane and the observer would keep the airplane wing from dipping down when he would steer with the rudder. If the airplane would dip the mirror would come off the object and you'd be looking 200 feet away from the target. As you moved upon your target you had this handle in your hand and you had this picture in your mirror and when the light lit 2 little contacts took place and the little red light came in the site and you hit the button and click.

H. That's a little more sophisticated than I'd heard.

P. It worked very good. Now the shackles were picked off of Al7's off of Martinique that we were shipping to the French. And we had Al7's the French had down there and of course the Vichy had already taken France, so the end of their Air Force. The Army Air Corps went down and got all these A7 bomb shackles off those, I mean B7's off those Al7 airplanes.

H. I'll be darned. Had to save everything at that time, huh? That's really interesting. Well, I'll tell you it's been a lot of fun, Parky. I thoroughly enjoyed it.